

Reality Testing

B. L. Driver

In his self-professed polemic, More wants us "... to turn a gimlet eye on the concepts used in recreation and leisure research." His central thesis appears to be that our concepts and assumptions have contributed toward inequitable provision of recreation opportunities for the lower income classes by public park and recreation (P & R) agencies.

My comments reflect four strong personal beliefs, which shape my perceptions of the reality of leisure research and recreation policy making and management. The author and I hold different perceptions of that reality, because much of his polemic is in opposition to my beliefs. First, I am very proud of the accomplishments that have been made in the leisure profession (see Driver, 1999a). The author's treatise is quite negative about our profession. Second, throughout my 35-year professional career, I have worked closely with (P & R) policy makers and managers, among other things helping them develop, apply, and refine four recreation/amenity resource management "systems" (i.e., the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, Wilderness Opportunity Zoning, Meaningful Measures, and Beneficial Outcomes systems). From those associations, I have gained great respect for and appreciation of P & R policy makers and other practitioners. They are dedicated and do well in offering leisure services to improve our society. I see the author's article as demeaning to those practitioners as well as to leisure scientists and legislators. Third, I believe that the greatest challenge facing the leisure profession is to understand better the benefits of recreation. That knowledge is needed to create ("reposition") a more accurate understanding of the contributions of leisure to our society. It is also needed to overtly optimize the feasible net benefits that can be realized from collaborative P & R policy making and management. By his criticism of the Benefits Approach to Leisure (BAL) and of research on the benefits of leisure, the author seems not to share this belief. Fourth, I believe it is very important to portray as accurately as possible the writings, concepts, and stated assumptions of others, especially if one's intent is to cast a gimlet eyeball on such. The author does not seem to understand, and thus misrepresents, many of the concepts he wants scrutinized. To help avoid such misrepresent-

Address correspondence to: Dr. B. L. Driver at bands@fiberpipe.net.

Author Note: Driver is a retired leisure scientist who has held faculty appointment in four universities, including The University of Michigan where he entered the leisure profession in 1967. Between 1973 and 1997, he worked in research for the USDA Forest Service. He lives near Centennial, Wyoming.

Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Don Bruns, Allen Jaten, George Peterson, and Peter Witt for their very helpful reviews of this paper.

tations myself, I have attempted to limit my comments to direct quotations from More's article.¹

More's Tone and Apparent Perception of Reality

One set of different perceptions the author and I have about the reality of P & R management and policy making and leisure research is that I could not criticize our profession as he readily does in the following statements. To wit, the author:

- Uses a title that sets a negative, even condescending, tone by the words "fraud and deceit in recreation management."
- Refers to leisure professionals as elitists.
- Questions whether others in leisure education, research, policy development, administration, or management have thought sufficiently about class differences as reflected by the statement "... is it appropriate to ask if public agencies have responsibilities or duties to serve... 'the working class or below,' implying the P & R agencies are not now doing so.
- States that: (1) "... the agencies have been **systematically stripped** of their capacities to respond;" (2) "... recreation management professionals will draw **selectively** on concepts, embracing those that enhance their interests and **ignore** those that do not;" (3) "What is **missing** is a strong recognition of public duty or responsibility;" and (4) "... we can expect managers to act in their own interests, choosing **selectively** among benefits," within the context that the managers will ignore public input not consonant with what the managers want to do.
- States further that (1) "... the political discourse of the past 30 years has been dominated by **libertarian** calls to cut taxes, limit spending, and generally reduce the size of the government;" (2) "Legislative interests **are driven** by the capture and retention of power;" and (3) "... activities that strengthen both individuals and families... should be encouraged rather than discouraged **as a matter of policy.**"
- States "... the agency [and institution] sets the [research] context, and we would do well to bear that in mind when interpreting results...." and "researchers are anxious to please managers."
- Implies that leisure professionals do not adequately understand the social context in which they work or "... sufficiently recognize patterns of interests that shape policy."

My responses follow.

First, during my career, I have known only one leisure professional who might qualify as an elitist.

Second, I suspect that most leisure researchers, as well as other leisure professionals, are aware of class differences and care about the recreational

¹To save space, I use bold print for emphasis, and when used within quotations, I do not include the normal brackets with "emphasis added" therein.

and other needs of the poor. Most municipal and regional P & R agencies give particular attention to the poor and disenfranchised. Interestingly, the author only mentions municipal agencies once in his reference to the Brooklyn Bridge Park. Instead, he focuses on federal agencies, mentions two state parks, and concentrates on outdoor recreation. This seems strange in an article that implies there is fraud and deceit in all recreation management and especially since the municipal P & R departments probably more widely serve the poor than recreation agencies at other levels of government. Furthermore, the poor have been considered in much research on leisure constraints, and many large household surveys have analyzed the recreational preferences and needs of different economic strata including people with lower incomes. Therefore, the recreational needs of the poor is not an unfamiliar topic to most recreational professionals. As such, it is an issue that could have been raised without the over lengthy discussion of social inequities in the United States, an issue about which all thinking people are at least aware. Lastly, I am confused about which income class the author is most concerned. At some places, he mentions the poor and disenfranchised, and in other places he focuses on the "working class or below." His statement that "Quantitative estimates place about 57% of the American population in the working class or below..." in combination with his statements about this class, leads me to assume that the author believes that P & R agencies are not addressing the needs of 57 percent of the population of the United States. This seems a real stretch.

Third, the author's statements about legislators (whom I assume includes those from the municipal to federal levels) and about P & R practitioners are not fair to them. I believe most of those people are dedicated and are doing their best to serve the public interest. I also believe that money and prestige are secondary concerns to most of them other than all entities need money to operate. Thus, I think the author's statements are inaccurate and very demeaning to those dedicated public servants. As one example, I know of no public P & R policy makers who discourage "... activities that strengthen both the individual and families" as a matter of policy. In fact, I see all P & R agencies pursuing those values. And I believe the author errs badly by stating that the managers "... will draw **selectively** on concepts, embracing those that enhance their interests and **ignore** those that do not." That grossly distorts the efforts and behaviors of those many managers who now truly practice a collaborative style of management, which is one of the best changes I have seen in my career.

Fourth, most leisure scientists appear to be independent thinkers. Beyond the author's opinion, there appears to be little justification for the statement that we should hold research results suspect because of institutional identity, which is the only logical implication I can draw from the author's statement that "... we do well to bear that [the institutional context] in mind when interpreting results."

Fifth, of course, most of us want our work to be appreciated and used by practitioners. But, no leisure scientists I respect do research simply be-

cause they are “anxious to please managers.” We are anxious to advance the states of knowledge and managerial practice.

Lastly, the policy analysts, sociologists, social psychologists, anthropologists, and economists who work in leisure certainly understand the “interests that shape policy.” And most practitioners are reminded every day of the frustrations they encounter because of the political, social, and economic contexts within which they work.

In summary on this section, I disagree with the author’s appraisals of leisure scientists, policy makers, and managers. Certainly, improvements can be made, but I think we are doing much better than the author states. The author’s perceptions of the leisure profession leads me to wonder if we are ignoring the poor, or the “working class and below,” as much as he states.

Lack of Understanding and Misrepresentations

Throughout More’s article, there are many misrepresentations of the ideas and issues to which he wants us to lend a “gimlet eye.” Because of space limitations, I focus on three of the four “ideologies” the author discusses at length in his major section entitled “**The [!] Discourse on Recreation Management.**”

The Overuse of Natural Environments

I understand the author’s argument that limiting use can impact different classes of people differently. Nevertheless, I notice three exaggerations in the author’s discussion. First, sure there are a relatively few people “... who would like to see people removed from natural environments altogether.” But that is seldom, if ever, the reason why a public P & R agency limits use. Use is normally limited to reduce congestion and prevent resource/facility damage, which the author acknowledges but seems to ignore. Second, I think the author exaggerates and certainly provides insufficient documentation for his assertion: “Where use is to be rationed... low income people will be the first to be excluded.” As only two examples, rationing of use in parts of designated wilderness areas and on many rivers probably has less impact on poor people than on other economic classes. Third, my experience in working with practitioners leads me to disagree strongly with the author’s statement that “... unfortunately, advocates of use limits seldom specify just whose use should be limited.”

Business Ideologies In Natural Resources

I find the author’s discussion of this topic to be very confused. First, the author seems to equate use of business principles in P & R management with a public P & R agency “... operating like a private-sector firm.” I have known no recreational professional who has advocated that public P & R agencies should operate as private firms or that profit maximization should be the goal of those agencies. However, many of us have promoted greater cost-

effectiveness, accountability, and much better justification of P & R agency expenditures. Such improved P & R allocation decisions require use of economic data as well as data for the other evaluations and considerations (e.g., distributive equity) involved in those decisions. They also require that recreationists should pay (via use and user fees) their fair share of the costs of providing the recreation opportunities they seek.

Second, the author is uninformed to argue that the concept of customer is only a business ideology. I know of no public P & R agency that uses the word customer as "... someone who buys something from someone who owns it." Many of us prefer use of that word over "visitor" or "user" to emphasize that many customers never visit the sites, areas, or facilities being managed and to promote a better guest-host perspective or customer orientation. In addition, the concept of customers as people to serve is now being used widely by many public service agencies.

Third, the author confuses the concept of economic efficiency with that of distributive equity and states that "... social inequality distorts the efficiency hypothesis to the point where it is virtually unuseable in public policy." The concept of economic efficiency says absolutely nothing about distributive equity; they are two different issues, and each needs to be considered in public allocation decisions. Even Milton Friedman has admitted that society often needs to trade efficiency for equity. Most of us believe that P & R agencies should try to be efficient in their operations. And we believe that the literally hundreds of economic studies of recreationists' willingness and ability to pay have helped promote greater efficiency. Those studies have also greatly enhanced our understanding not only of the worth of leisure services but also of the social inequities about which the author is concerned. The author's statement that "Using economic efficiency weighs decisions toward preferences of the affluent" is only partly true. Yes, efficiency is essentially a "one-dollar-one-vote" criterion, but it is used by Wal-Mart and Burger King where I haven't encountered a lot of affluent people. I know of no P & R agency allocation decisions that have been based solely on the economic efficiency criterion, as the author implies they sometimes are. In fact, I asked a respected economist friend to review my comments, and he stated "Few, if any, sane economists would argue that economic efficiency should be the sole criterion."

Fourth, I disagree with the author's comment that "... even small fees have substantial impacts on low-income families." I have reviewed a much larger number of studies on that topic than those cited by the author, and my interpretation is that the impacts vary considerably between different types of recreation opportunity. For example, *small fees* have very little impact on low-income families in areas and activities that have always shown little use by such people especially because of other costs of participation.

Fifth, despite all his polemic, I do not understand what the author's stance on recreation fees is, mostly because of his statement that "If we are unable to convince legislators of the value of public recreation so that appropriations are not forthcoming, and if even small fees have substantial

impacts on low-income families, what then, is an agency to do? There are two choices: shutting down (closure) or privatizing.” This seems more a pout than a polemic, and neither of his “two choices” would seem to serve well the recreational needs of the “working class or below.” The statement implies the author believes that all publicly provided recreation opportunities should be provided free through public subsidy, but he is not explicit. If that is his belief, would he advocate free use of public golf courses or no fee requirements to use snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park, to hunt in some other parks and on national forests, to run a motor boat on Lake Powell, and so on? If nothing else, the statement reveals poor understanding of the basic principles of public finance, and I am sure the author does not understand the political contexts which have led to increased recreation fees in the United States and in more than thirty other countries I have visited professionally.

Benefits and Values

The author does not understand the BAL, sometimes called the Net Benefits Approach and which some of us are now calling the Beneficial Outcomes Approach. This lack of understanding is surprising, because the author cites two of the most recent publications on the BAL. My specific comments are outlined below.

The author’s comment that “... the benefits approach has been **extensively** criticized” is misleading. There has been widespread support and application of the BAL and only a few instances of it being criticized. Relevant too is the fact that two of the critical articles cited by the author unfairly misrepresented the BAL.

The author criticizes the list of benefits of leisure included in many recent papers written on the BAL. Table 21.1 (p. 352) in the author-cited Driver and Bruns (1999) paper shows that list. The title of that table is “Specific Types And General Categories of Benefits **That Have Been Attributed to Leisure by Research.**” Neither that nor any other publication on the BAL cited by the author never did “... insist that the scientific basis of **each** [listed benefit] is well established.” In fact, Driver (1999b) states “Much better documentation exists for some categories and types of benefits than for others.... many of the benefits [listed]... require greater confirmation.” That list and other documentations of the benefits of leisure were included in our papers: to show that there is sufficient documentation to give the BAL reasonable scientific credibility; to serve as a check list for managers and their collaborators to use when deciding which benefits to target; to support the argument that the contributions of leisure services to total welfare of a society is probably being underestimated; and to help members of the leisure profession create more accurate images about the total value we add to a society. Furthermore, in his criticism of that list, the author questions why increased humility is listed as a benefit of leisure and whether managers should ever try to provide opportunities for such. Anyone with a full understanding of

the BAL would recognize that system never advocates that a particular benefit opportunity be provided. That decision must be made by P & R managers and their collaborating stakeholders and associated providers. And yes, promoting increased humility has been targeted by P & R managers in planning efforts with which I have been associated.

The author also argues that the BAL exaggerates the benefits of leisure. That might be true, but neither the author nor anyone else knows the actual extent and magnitude of those benefits. While I do not believe the slogan of the National Park and Recreation Association that “The Benefits Are Endless,” I remain convinced that we have underestimated those benefits. The author tries to prove the BAL exaggerates the benefits by arguing that many of the listed benefits of leisure need not be realized from recreational pursuits. Several recent papers (e.g., Driver, 1999b) have elaborated in great detail that when taken **individually or separately**, no benefit of leisure is uniquely dependent on a particular recreation activity or setting. Put simply, each benefit can also be realized in non-recreational pursuits. The author also asks “... if our interests (as researchers and managers) lead us to **overstate** the positive [sic] benefits..., and if the substantive benefits involved are **linked to social class at all**.” Of the scores of applications of the BAL with which I am quite familiar, I know of none which were not linked to social class, and several focused explicitly of the lower income classes.

More's misunderstanding of the BAL is blatantly reflected by his comments that the BAL does not require a “... causal link between management and the occurrence of benefits” and that the BAL “ducks the issue” of needing to look at the “disbenefits” or undesirable impacts of the provision and use of recreation services as well as the benefits.” The author-cited Driver and Bruns (1999) paper, which stated up front (p. 350): “The fundamental question raised by the BAL is why should a particular leisure service be provided. The answer is formulated in terms of **clearly defined positive and negative consequences of delivering that service, with the objective being to optimize net benefits—or to add as much value as possible**.” Moreover, we explained, “To do this, leisure policy makers and managers must understand what values would be added by each leisure service provided, articulate those values, and understand how to capture them.” I emphasize that all the publications the author cites on the BAL state clearly that it requires that disbenefits (negative impacts) be considered. As we stated in the author-cited Driver, Bruns, and Booth (2001) paper, the only reason that paper was entitled the “**Net Benefits Approach to Leisure**” was “to emphasize the need to consider negative as well as positive outcomes—and thereby hopefully clarify past confusion on this issue.” In response to the author's statement, “Clearly, the benefits claimed need to have at least something to do with the **purpose** of having the facility or program,” it must be iterated that each of the papers the author cites on the BAL emphasize that the fundamental question raised by that approach is *WHY*. As explained in those papers, this explicitly means that the BAL requires that the reasons for, “purposes” of, or “functions” of providing or not providing any recreation service must be

determined in terms of the likely desirable and undesirable impacts or outcomes of providing that service and its subsequent use.

Lastly, the author states, "With budgets to justify, managers expect help from researchers in making the benefits of their programs as large as possible. Such a perspective does not encourage critical thinking." Given that the BAL explicitly calls for focusing on net benefits, the author seems to be confused; is it preferable that managers try to make the **net** benefits of their programs as small as possible? A related point is that at several places in his article, the author states that the primary purpose/goal of the BAL is to justify recreation budgets and programs. Here again a lack of understanding of the BAL is evident. As explained clearly in Driver, Bruns, and Booth (2001), the four purposes of the Benefits Approach are to: (1) help leisure policy makers "... more accurately describe and articulate with enhanced credibility the social benefits of recreation" which is what I mean by justifying public-sector budget requests and expenditures of public funds; (2) help guide P & R management by giving the managers "... more explicit guidance for management actions directed toward optimizing the net benefits their actions could likely produce;" (3) help leisure scientists and educators "... understand better the positive and negative consequences of leisure behavior... [and document] better the net benefits of leisure;" and (4) help promote greater understanding of the important role of leisure in a society. So, yes one purpose of the BAL is to help provide more objective justification of "recreation budgets and programs," but that is not its only purpose as More states it is at several places in his article.

This critique of More's section on "Benefits and Values" requires consideration also of his section entitled "An Alternative Functionalism." For several reason, there is nothing in the proposed functionalism that is not now already covered by the Benefits Approach.

First, let's look at the author's statements that "The explicit goal of benefits research is to justify budgets..." "... the concept [the BAL] was developed **expressly** to convince legislators of the value of recreation," and "The functionalism approach, **by contrast**, seeks to identify the purposes that recreation serves in order to set appropriate policy." To iterate for emphasis, the fundamental WHY question raised by the BAL addresses the purposes or functions (to individuals, groups of individuals, and the biophysical environment) of the management and use of P & R resources. Furthermore, the papers the author cites on the BAL have been explicit that no leisure service should be provided without understanding its positive and negative impacts. So how can the author's functionalism "**contrast**" with the BAL with regard to identifying "... the purposes that recreation serves in order to set appropriate policy?" I point out also that several papers (e.g., Driver 1999b) on the BAL point out that it was developed to help P & R agencies and policy makers be more accountable, cost-effective, responsive, fair (equitable), and to sustain the bio-physical environment. What other "purposes or "functions" need to be considered?

Second, as indicated by the above quotations and by other statements of the author, one is left to wonder why he seems to have problems with the BAL helping justify P & R agencies budgets and "... convince legislators of the value of recreation." A first logical conclusion is that the author does not want public programs to have as much objective and subjective justification as possible or for public officials to be as accountable as possible by being able to articulate clearly why they are expending scarce public funds? But that conclusion must not be correct, because the author endorses such justification in his statements that "The functionalism approach... seeks to identify the purposes that recreation serves in order to set appropriate policy" and that we should either privatize or shut down "if we are unable to convince legislators of the value of public recreation." This apparent contradiction is confusing.

Third, the author's implication that the BAL does not take a systems approach and requires consideration of P & R management within the context of the "supra system involved" again documents his lack of understanding of the BAL. Recent papers on the BAL state that it is based in General Systems Theory. And, the cited paper by Driver, Bruns, and Booth (2001) demonstrated that consideration of supra- and sub-systems is required by the BAL. It is explicit to the discussion in that paper of needs for ongoing collaboration with all managerially relevant stakeholders especially associated providers and the discussion of the need to consider remote off-site customers.

Fourth, I don't see how functionalism "makes a clear distinction between public and private" or how it offers anything useful in establishing such distinctions. A systems perspective of P & R management requires that public agencies work collaboratively with all associated providers, many of whom are in the private or quasi-private sectors. Furthermore, an important public finance criterion for determining which goods and services should be provided by the private or public sectors is the "meritorious" nature of that good or service to society, determined in terms of the magnitudes of the external economies and diseconomies likely to result from the production and consumption of that good or service. As stated in the papers on the BAL cited by the author, those economies (benefits) and diseconomies (negative impacts) must be made explicit under the BAL. Thus, the BAL would seem to offer more toward determining whether a particular good or service should be in the private or public sector than More's functionalism.

Summary

I too believe that all public agencies must demonstrate great care in how they adopt and apply business-like principles and that all leisure professionals should be ever attentive to the needs of particular subcultures (e.g., the poor, people with physical and mental disabilities/challenges, members of ethnic groups, etc.). I also agree that we should not just "turn" but ever bear a

“gimlet eye on the concepts used in recreation and leisure research.” Therefore, there is some **basic** agreement between us. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, I disagree with most of More’s polemic in support of these basic agreements, because he weakens his supporting arguments to the point of rejection for several reasons.

First, for More’s “gimlet eye” to be effective in **falsifying errors** (per the epistemology of Karl Popper, 1959) in scientific inquiry and recreation policy making and management, the ideas, concepts, and theories being evaluated must be the ones proposed by the people from whom they originated and not misrepresentations of such. The author loses much credibility by failing this test badly. [Such distortions continue in More’s rejoinder.]

Second, the article contains many exaggerated and inaccurate statements that are condescending, negative, and grossly unfair especially to P & R managers and policy makers, as well as to leisure scientists. That tone serves to turn readers off.

Lastly, the author offers few if any substantive and feasible recommendations for improvement. For example, few leisure professionals disagree with the author that public P & R agencies should consider the recreational needs of all income classes. But what is the responsibility of these agencies to purposefully redistribute income toward the poor and why; what is the role of P & R agencies as welfare agencies? And to what degree do members of the lower income classes prefer such distribution in the form of leisure opportunities versus other means of support for their many needs beyond recreational opportunities? Put simply, the article is full of critical comments about “concepts used in leisure research and recreation.” But negativism is rather easy; the difficult task is making positive and feasible recommendations for change.

In a nutshell, the author and I differ greatly in our perceptions of the reality of leisure research and recreation policy making and management. I have tried to share the results of my long-term and on-going tests of that reality.

References

- Driver, B. L. (1999a). Recognizing and celebrating progress in leisure studies. In Jackson, E. & Burton, T. (Eds). *Leisure Studies: Prospects for the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 523-534). State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- Driver, B. L. (1999b). Management of public outdoor recreation and related amenity resources or the benefits they provide. In Cordell, H. K. *Outdoor Recreation in American Life: A National Assessment and Demand and Supply Trends* (pp. 2-5 and 27-29). Champaign, IL: Sagamore Publishing.
- Driver, B. & Bruns, D. (1999). Concepts and uses of the Benefits Approach to Leisure. In Jackson, E. L.; Burton, T. L. (Eds). *Leisure Studies: Prospects for the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 349-368). State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- Driver, B., Bruns, D. & Booth, K. (2001). Status and some common misunderstandings of the Net Benefits Approach to Leisure. *Trends 2000: Shaping the Future. Contributed Papers, The 5th Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Trends Symposium*. East Lansing, MI: Department of Park, Recreation and Tourism Resources, Michigan State University.
- Popper, K. (1959). *Logic of Scientific Discovery*. N.Y. Basic Books